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FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4267

INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0596

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0339

RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0074

RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 0022

RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN 0003

RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 0547

RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0051

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0298

RUEHMZ/AMCONSUL MUNICH 0006

RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0087

RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0059

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0299

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 0076

RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 0263

RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 2492

RUEHJO/AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG 0761

RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 0166

RUEHDU/AMCONSUL DURBAN 0115

RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 3008

RUEHAN/AMEMBASSY ANTANANARIVO 0781

RUEHSB/AMEMBASSY HARARE 0123

RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0340

RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 0001

RUEHBN/AMCONSUL MELBOURNE 0026

RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 0086

RUEHKL/AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR 0076

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT LOUIS 000387

JOHANNESBURG FOR MICHAEL VEASY

PARIS PLEASE PASS TO APP LYON

CA/ACS/OCS/AF FOR RUTH BRANSON

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CASC](#) [ICAO](#) [MP](#)

SUBJECT: FIREBALL 2008 PROVIDES FEW SPARKS OF INTEREST AT SSR AIRPORT

¶1. (U) Summary. Airports of Mauritius Co Ltd (AML) held its biannual disaster exercise at Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam International Airport (SSR), entitled "Fireball 2008," on November 6, with participation from over 20 agencies and offices, including several diplomatic missions. The full-scale simulation dealt with a fictional "Air Best" (an Air France plane was used) flight that overruns the runway on takeoff and hits a localizer, resulting in the aircraft breaking in two and catching fire, with emergency response, crisis committee, and other disaster response centers activating and responding. Over 50 actors were provided to play the roles of passengers and crew, survivors and casualties, and family members at the airport. Conoff acted as an observer in the Relatives Reception Centre (RRC) and provided feedback to AML on the exercise. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Fireball 2008 was a full-scale simulation crash exercise in line with the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Standard and Recommended Practices. The 2008 incarnation was the fifth at SSR, with the first happening in 2000. Fireball 2008 was a full-notice exercise (except for the exact start time) focused on response, resources deployment, and crisis management attributes with over 20 participating agencies, including various police and emergency services, airlines, airport offices, fuel companies, embassies, and other government offices. Planning for the event started in late August and culminated with the event on November 6.

¶3. (U) Conoff participated as an observer and was stationed in the Relatives Reception Centre (RRC). Actors portraying family members of the passengers on board the crashed plane were brought by bus to the RRC after being cleared by the airline in the terminal. The RRC

was to act as a holding area until survivors were brought to a Reunification Centre. At one point, the "relatives" acted out, demanding to see family members and attempting to storm out of the room. While the police attempted to block the door, voices were raised and one relative "fainted." She was picked up and laid on a chair, then quickly moved to a table top. An airline official called a nurse, who arrived roughly 20 minutes later. By then, the fainted actor had regained consciousness and rejoined the fray at the door.

¶4. (SBU) Comment. Conoff listened to the emergency response via police radio and noted that the fire was handled quickly, and ambulances arrived shortly thereafter. However, the exercise made clear that the airline and airport staff is underequipped to deal with a large number of relatives seeking information about family members on the crashed plane. For example, the airline used a paper system to check family members into the room, and had only 5 employees to handle the family of 120 passengers. The room had only two desks for processing family members, which quickly resulted in a back-up of people and confusion as to who had been checked in and who had not. Magazines were provided, but placed in piles on a few chairs away from the waiting family members and were noted only by the observers. The airline was tasked to provide refreshments, but did not bring any until one of the "relatives" demanded tea -- the airline provided juice boxes and opened a few boxes of crackers. There was a lack of distinct leadership in the RRC that allowed things to get out of hand quickly -- while the police were able to barricade the door, they could not do much to calm the crowd, which should have been done by the airline employees.

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¶5. (SBU) This exercise clearly demonstrated that, in the case of a real emergency, embassy staff must be present at the crisis point to assist with U.S. Citizens affected by the crisis. Conoff is actively working with AML and airline officials to ensure that in the event of an emergency, embassy staff will be able to play a large role in multiple facets of response. AML officials have stated that they have an expectation of embassies in Mauritius to aid during a crisis, especially with passengers' relatives. End comment.

CABRERA